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## **An archaeology of Arctic travel journalism**

'Truth in travel'

– *Conde Nast Traveller*

### **Introduction**

It is widely recognised that exciting tales of exploration and adventure play a key role in generating a desire to travel among reading audiences. Stories of heroic adventures are highly valued as promotional material in the tourism industry, and are among the various tropes included in many forms of travel writing, whether utopian or dystopian, heroic or anti-heroic. Weekend newspaper travel sections and supplements are replete with travel stories and tourism advertising, and specialist travel magazines and brochures are hard to avoid. If we start from the assumption that it is the imagination of travel that provokes people to become tourists themselves, attention to imaginative texts and media is valuable on many levels.

The journal *Studies in Travel Writing* in which this article features is testament to the scholarly interest in travel writing over at least the past two decades. The overwhelming majority of debate concerns literary criticism or intertextual analysis of long-form travel literature. In contrast, travel journalism attracts remarkably little attention. As Catherine Mee (2015) argues, journalistic texts are often seen as inferior to literary texts in a field heavy with nostalgia for earlier forms of travel. This widespread sense of the inferiority of travel journalism is apparently shared by many news journalists: Greenman's introduction to travel journalism (2012) begins precisely by refuting claims that travel journalism is little more than puffed-up advertising.

However, the myriad forms of travel journalism have seen extraordinary growth in recent years, paralleling the growth and scale of tourism, and suggesting that travel journalism is more than ready for serious scholarly attention today. Examining the means of production of travel journalism may help us understand which themes and tropes are treated, how these are reproduced, and for what reasons. What role, for example, does travel journalism actually play in promoting tourism? How far does travel journalism reproduce the tropes of colonial narratives? Who are the authors of travel journalism, how are they financed, and what do they gain from their writing? Where is travel journalism published, how is it distributed, who commissions it and who edits it? Limited existing research does outline some answers to these preliminary questions. Our aim in this article is, by interrogating the politics of the production of the text and the means by which it is circulated, to consider the role and influence of different interests in travel journalism and to understand the influence it

may have on other forms of textual production. Analysing how a repertoire of stereotypes is reproduced enables us to consider the potential for production of more accurate, more subtle, or more culturally sensitive and engaged literatures.

In the following, we argue that close attention to the everyday practices of travel journalism can highlight the kinds of ethical positions, compromises and frameworks that shape the texts that circulate, and in so doing reveal how particular tropes and stereotypes are created and replicated. In keeping with this special issue of *Studies in Travel Writing*, our particular example explores how postcolonial narratives about the European High North (and, by loose corollary, the Arctic) are produced, circulated and consumed at the present moment. The article is based on participant observation and interviews with travel journalists, PR agents, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), and other tourism actors. Before addressing our case, we give a brief introduction to contemporary debates about travel journalism.

### **From travel writing to travel journalism: The research landscape**

Current academic research on journalism tends to focus on news and political reporting, despite signs that audiences for such media are on the wane (Hanusch 2010). Until recently, most scholars in media and communications studies limited their research on journalism to the practice of foreign correspondents or TV news crews (Fürsich and Kavoori 2001), a tendency shared by many anthropologists (see, for example, Hannerz). But journalism exists well beyond the news, particularly since the exponential growth of non-fiction entertainment such as reality and lifestyle programming has served to blur the lines between journalism and entertainment (Damkjær and Waade 2014; Fürsich 2002). As a genre, travel journalism has been on the rise particularly since the end of the twentieth century alongside the development of various forms of new media and 'armchair tourism' practices associated with the mediated lifestyles of consumer culture (Waade 2006). Among scholars of media and communication, travel journalism was seen until recently to be a 'frivolous topic' for research (Fürsich and Kavoori 2001, xx). Hanusch and Fürsich have drawn attention to widespread prejudice in the journalism industry against 'soft' writing (covering most 'lifestyle' journalism), and travel journalism is sometimes criticised for being 'so allied with the travel industry that it is more a product of public relations than journalism' (ibid, 2). Not so long ago Fussell even wondered whether travel writing had a particular attraction for 'second-rate talents' (Fussell 1982, 212), who then proceeded to write what Levi-Strauss condemned as 'pabulum' (1995, 17), while Holland and Huggan have shown more recently how travel writers are sometimes considered 'essentially frivolous or even morally dangerous' (2000, vii). Similarly, Greenman reflects on the way that travel journalism is often thought to be a field requiring 'no particular expertise' in which texts are penned largely by 'handmaidens to the travel and tourism industry' who 'take freebies in return for favorable accounts of must visit tourism destinations' (2012, 1). All of this seems to stem from the fact

that the act of travel is so often associated with tourism and leisure that even many journalists consider their own work to be little more than a holiday. In other words, there is a widespread assumption that 'anyone can go on holidays, and anyone can write about them' (Hanusch and Fürsich 2014, 2).

Despite this singular lack of esteem, travel writing has become a widely consumed form of contemporary writing. Both travel writing and the writers who produce such work have 'proven remarkably immune to even the harshest criticisms' (Holland and Huggan 2000, vii). More pertinent to this article, the media continues to have importance for would-be traveller-consumers looking for recommendations not just about where to go, but about what to experience when they get there (Nielsen 2001). Hanusch and Fürsich (2014) state that 'media and journalism play an immensely important role in communicating destinations to potential tourists'. They also note that the terms 'travel writing', 'travel literature' and 'travel journalism' are often used interchangeably, despite the specific industry contexts in which they are produced. While different kinds of travel literature are categorised by form (narrative travelogues, destination feature articles, travel blogs, and so on), their authors may not fall so neatly into discrete groups. A single author may write as a travel writer, travel journalist, guidebook writer or travel blogger, producing multiple stories for multiple outlets across multiple media. For example, as Cocking (2009) has noted, travel writing literati such as Eric Newby, Jan Morris, William Dalrymple and Colin Thubron have all written for the travel sections of Britain's broadsheets, suggesting a substantial degree of crossover.

Critics still insist that the genres and their authors should be differentiated. Greenman, for example, argues that what differentiates the travel journalist from the travel writer is the latter's attention to 'independence, ethics, timeliness, substantiality, and a public-service orientation' (Greenman 2012, 8; see also Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). If, as Hanusch and Fürsich argue, journalism writ large is typified by 'fact, accuracy, truth, and ethical conduct' (Ibid, 7), travel journalism might then be defined as 'travel writing produced to a journalistic standard' (ibid, 2). Kaplan goes so far as to propose travel writing as a broader model for a more grounded journalism:

Journalism desperately needs a return to *terrain*, to the kind of first-hand, solitary discovery of local knowledge best associated with old-fashioned travel writing. Travel writing is more important than ever as a means to reveal the vivid reality of places that get lost in the elevator music of 24-hour media reports (Kaplan 2006, 49, cited in Hanusch and Fürsich 2014, 15).

Is it possible that travel journalism shares the features that Kaplan attributes to travel writing? Is it somehow more real, more grounded, or more akin to in-depth ethnographic research than what is sometimes called 'parachute journalism' (Hannerz)? Only by paying close attention to the means by which travel journalism finds its way into print can we assess the claims made for it. Despite continuing arguments over the role and value of travel journalism, little critical attention has been

given to the various actors involved in producing texts or the larger industry behind their production that can be categorised as travel journalism (Cocking 2014).

In this article, we therefore turn our attention to the people and processes behind these media products: tourism board representatives or destination management office staff, public relations executives and editors are all in constant negotiation with each other, and with the writers of the published work. On occasion, tourism ministers and their staff may be involved directly or indirectly. While the journalists may do the actual writing of articles, their writing emerges from a mesh of transactions and relationships that combine to create what we refer to here as the *negotiated creation of a destination*.

## **Reflections on methodology**

In order to investigate the contemporary production of travel journalism, we carried out a mixed-methods study of journalism practices. This included a series of interviews with journalists, editors, public relations professionals, tourism board representatives and other actors in the travel/writing industry. Some of these were undertaken at journalism conventions and media networking events, such as blogger events or 'tweetups'. In order to get under the skin of the travel writing industry and see it from the inside, we also engaged in participant observation in several ways. As one of us already had extensive experience of the travel writing industry as a writer, editor and photographer (Roger Norum), he was able to guide the other (Simone Abram) through the highways and byways of the travel industry, so that the various steps along this journey could be recorded and reflected upon. Abram, for her part, undertook to participate in press trips or familiarisation ('fam') trips, seek commissions for publication, and develop a writing style acceptable to publishers and promoters. In so doing, we were together able to explore the pressures, opportunities and dilemmas that travel journalists face in their work, while using the interviews to gain insight into the positions and experiences of others involved in the production of journalism texts. Our research experience being primarily from a journalist's perspective, we have taken steps to ensure that this is complemented by the in-depth discussions mentioned above, i.e. with travel company representatives, PR professionals, Destination Management Organisations, publishers, and so forth. Most of the research was carried out in 2013–2015 as part of the HERA-funded research project 'Arctic Encounters: Travel/Writing in the European High North'.

## **Genealogy of an article**

In the case study presented here, we dig below the surface of a published article to reveal the relations and practices that form it. Our case study article was published in the *Scotsman*, a national daily newspaper published in Scotland by Johnstone Press.

The article features in the weekend travel supplement of the newspaper, but did not appear in the online version. In Figure 1 below, the whole article is shown in final published layout (here reproduced in pdf format). It shows the main features of the article in its published form, including images, titles, the 'factbox', and references to elements promoted during the 'fam' trip. Below, we also tell the story of the article through the various elements identified in its final published form (Fig. 1).

### *Factbox*

All travel articles usually contain a 'factbox'. The content of the box is decided by the writer, but it is the clearest place in the article for the writer to reciprocate for the hospitality offered by the trip organisers by directly promoting their offer. The 'factbox' can thus be seen as revealing a world of reciprocity that supports the world of travel journalism, writ small. The financial equations of travel journalism have come under increasing pressure in recent years, reflecting the reduction in circulation of print media generally, and particularly newspapers (including Sunday supplements). While a few companies still pay a minimal staff to write professionally (such as travel editors and perhaps one or two staff writers), most rely on a combination of free or low-cost freelance work and reader-content. While readers may contribute texts for the pleasure of seeing their work in print, freelancers tend either to be in the business of producing text for money, or to see travel writing as an occasional means to subsidise their personal travel plans. In either case, they will seek to travel without paying, in some cases as a point of principle. The principle is that the journey will comprise a reciprocal relation such that the provider is 'paid' in terms of the publicity given to the company through the published text. This is not an unconditional form of reciprocation, however, since the journalist chooses what to mention and what not to mention. The tacit understanding among travel journalists appears (from our findings at least) to be that only those tourism products considered to reach a certain standard will be given the publicity intrinsic to being mentioned in the published text, whether in the 'factbox' itself or in the wider article. Of the many elements of hospitality offered, only a small selection can be mentioned in the article, offering considerable discretion – a discretion which applies to all other aspects of the article. Some publications require authors to state directly what the writer paid for and what was paid for them (and by whom). This can be done with subtlety (e.g. 'Simone travelled with Atlantic Airways...') or explicitly ('Simone's trip was paid for by Atlantic Airways...'). An informed reader may ascertain this information from the box itself, which is a mini-guide to the relations of reciprocity that are implicit in the text.

The factbox can thus be read as the first indication of the provenance of the article. It identifies, albeit indirectly, the sponsors of the 'fam' trip. This particular trip was sponsored by Atlantic Airways, and supported by the destination management organisation of the Faroes. The trip was organised by a PR agent contracted to Atlantic Airways, who offered flights and arranged accommodation, transport at the

destination including visits to various attractions, and meals. Having established a contract with the Airlines, the PR agent (Stan Abbott) distributed a notice via the British Guild of Travel Writers, a membership organisation of travel writers and journalists (bgtw.org). Roger, as a member of the Guild, received an email announcement (Fig. 2). This explains how the opportunity first arose to participate in this specific trip.

Stan Abbott is once again taking a media group to the remarkable Faroe Islands, in June. This trip is organised by Stan on behalf of Atlantic Airways and Visit Faroe Islands, in partnership with Inntravel. Inntravel added the islands to its Nordic destinations this year and so the focus on this visit will be some of the walks that Inntravel has included in its recommended itinerary.

Please register your interest by emailing [stan@xxxxxx.yy](mailto:stan@xxxxxx.yy) Places are limited and will go to those demonstrating a commission or "strong promise" from a relevant publication (national, major regional, walking, outdoors, travel, adventure).

NB If you respond to this email you may miss out on a space as we will be out of the office for a few days

BE SURE TO CONTACT STAN DIRECTLY

A walk on the wild side  
Faroe Islands Media Trip, in partnership with Inntravel and Visit Faroe Islands  
Thurs June 5 to Mon June 9, 2014  
Draft itinerary

Set in the wild North Atlantic, mid-way between Scotland and Iceland, the dramatic Faroe Islands have been dubbed the world's favourite unspoiled island destination by experts at National Geographic Traveler and "maybe the most curious place left on Earth" by the New York Times. On this trip, hosted by Atlantic Airways in partnership with Inntravel Visit Faroe Islands, we'll be focusing specifically on the fantastic opportunities for walking: correctly-soled, sturdy outdoor shoes (preferably walking boots) and warm waterproof clothing are essential for this trip and.

Thursday June 5

1100 – Meet at Stansted Airport.

1320 – Depart for Faroe Islands

1540 – Arrive Vágar Airport, Faroe Islands. There is no time difference with UK

1700 – Arrive at the picturesque village of Gjógv and check in at Gjáargarður guest house.

1730 – Local walk

1930 – Dinner at Gjáargarður

Friday June 6

0930 – Transfer to Klaksvík

1134 – Helicopter to the island of Svínø 1150 – Walk on Svínø

Evening, time TBC – return boat

Taxi transfer to Klaksvík

Overnight Hotel Klaksvík

Saturday June 7

1000 – Ferry to the dramatic finger-shaped island of Kalsoy, nicknamed "the flute" because of all the tunnels cut through the mountains to accommodate the only road. Legend has it that a "seal woman"

was captured here and forced to marry a farmer's son. Later she found her seal skin and returned to the sea. We'll take a scenic walk to the lighthouse and, visit a smithy and the artists' village of Mikladalur.

1735 – Return ferry to Klaksvík

1900 – Arrive Hotel Føroyar, Tórshavn.

2000 -- Supper at Koks, fine dining Faroese restaurant, in the hotel.

Sunday June 9

0930 – Walk over hills to Kirkjubø, for lunch at the farm where you will meet farmer Jóannes Patursson, who is 17th generation living at the farm, Roykstovan. View the ruins of St Magnus's Cathedral, spiritual home of the islands.

1430 – Return bus to Tórshavn

1530 -- Walking tour of Tinganes, the "old town" and site of the original Viking parliament

1630 – Free time

1930 – Dinner at Aarstova, traditional Faroese restaurant

Monday June 10

0520 – Transfer to airport

0700 – Depart to Stansted

0920 – Arrive Stansted

Contact details

Stan Abbott [+44 XXXXXXXX](tel:+44XXXXXXX).

Participants

The trip is organised on behalf of Atlantic Airways, the Faroese national airline, in association with Inntravel and Visit Faroe Islands. [www.atlantic.fo](http://www.atlantic.fo); [www.visitfaroeislands.com](http://www.visitfaroeislands.com); <http://www.inntravel.co.uk>

General Information

The weather in the Faroe Islands is changeable and can probably be compared to Scotland's west coast, although slightly cooler. It is therefore important that you bring appropriate attire with you including a waterproof jacket, stout footwear and warm clothes.

As our guests you will not be required to pay for any flights, transfers, accommodation or main meals that are specified within this itinerary. We will however not be able to cover any additional expenses such as drinks, snacks, room service, souvenirs etc. or any other costs incurred by activities outside of the drinks, snacks, room service, souvenirs etc. or any other costs incurred by activities outside of the organised itinerary. It is therefore advisable that you do bring some currency, which is Danish Kroner, or there are cash machines at the airport and in Tórshavn.

Figure 2: fam trip announcement

The announcement makes a clear statement of intent by stating that, 'Places are limited and will go to those demonstrating a commission or "strong promise" from a relevant publication (national, major regional, walking, outdoors, travel, adventure)'. The 'fam' trip is not a free holiday, rather it is an opportunity to gather information that will be published in the form of a story in a publication with a wide readership. Our task, in order to gain a place on the trip, was to get a commission from such a publication. This entailed us employing the art of the 'pitch'. A pitch is a communication sent to an editor in the hope of gaining an agreement in principle that they will be likely to publish the article that results from the trip. Roger composed an email to be sent to a range of publications until one of them showed an interest in the potential story (see Fig. 3). The pitch employs the anticipated language of the article,



indicates the main features to be highlighted, and as well as indicating style, proposes the length and timing of the production of the article. Perhaps because Roger is known as a travel writer, he does get some responses, even negative ones, from national newspapers. One replies to say, 'Many thanks for your suggestion. I'm afraid that I can't offer you a commission, though I will bear you in mind if we need anything similar'. After a few tries, an editor replies 'Thanks for this could we have 1000 words plus factbox, thanks! but I'm afraid we don't have a travel budget, sorry about that!'

The Faroes have been called “the most curious place left on Earth” – and this is a curiosity best satisfied on foot. My feature would focus on exploring the islands overland with a good pair of summer hiking boots on. With waterfalls, cliff faces, oyster-catchers and brightly coloured wooden homes, the Faroes’ southernmost islands are perfect for summertime walks, when the morning fog enshrouds a mystical landscape of lighthouses and moors, and small artisan villages buzz with activity. I think this could make a great destination feature for a late summer issue of the paper, and I could have you a 1,200-word feature by mid-June.

Could you let me know what you think when you have a moment?

Fig. 3 The 'pitch' for a commission.

This response, from the Lifestyle editor of the *Scotsman*, indicates how editors deal with the lack of funding, since they know that even if they are not paying travel journalists for content, journalists can use the 'commission' to get access to 'fam' trips and the like, going on to produce further texts that may find paid commissions elsewhere. With a commission in hand, we had hoped that both of us might be able to join the 'fam' trip, with Roger as writer and Simone as photographer. Our contact at Inntravel who co-sponsored the 'fam' trip, was in touch with Stan (the PR agent for the 'fam' trip: see above), to try to secure our places, but the response was negative: 'I'm afraid this isn't possible: I have already had to turn away someone who wanted to come with two people and I'm afraid that it's all geared to rooms booked and, more especially, the fact that there isn't room on the minibus!'. Stan suggested that Simone join a different trip the following week for agents, where she could be an agent on behalf of Inntravel. Later the same day, however, he sent a message to say that the agents' trip was also full. Roger and Simone decided that Simone should take the trip and produce the article, since she was less familiar with the process and would be in a position to learn reflexively through participant observation. (In the next part of the article, the first person refers to Simone.)

The absence of a writer's fee for the article clearly raises a number of questions about the ethics and responsibilities of travel journalism. The writer is plainly performing a service for the travel company, but at the same time is accepting their hospitality. The

writer is also performing a service for the publication, but the editor knows that the writer needs the commission in order to get the trip. The publication needs copy to print, but the editor has an inadequate budget to supply paid-for journalism, and seeks other ways to procure copy that is of service to the destination or travel promotion company. Hence the number of ethical obligations begins to multiply between the parties involved in the exercise.

### *The story*

At Stansted airport (train fare not covered by the invitation), Stan welcomed a diverse group of six participants by the check-in desk for Atlantic Airways. One participant, Sally, represented Inntravel, Bob wrote a blog for his own widely-read walking website, while Sue and Gail were confirmed travel journalists, Bella was in a temporary post at a popular women's magazine, and Charlotte did occasional travel writing to supplement her food and gardening publications. Bob carried a small backpack, while Sue dragged an enormous holdall that contained all her gear for a series of travels. A rather straggling group, we went separate ways until the plane boarded, and on arrival we assembled in the arrivals hall for Stan to walk us to a waiting minibus that he had hired for the occasion. Then we embarked on the itinerary outlined above, with Stan narrating the trip while driving the minibus, briefing us about the history and politics of the Faroes, pointing out significant landmarks, and stopping for us to take photographs from lookout points. As the weather was fine, we stopped for a walk on the way to the first hotel, climbing the highest peak on the islands, about an hour's steep hike from a lay-by on the road. The atmosphere was excitable and chatty, as we compared views, boots, cameras, and so forth. At the summit, each of the participants set up views with their cameras, sometimes posing for others to take a shot that could be used either as a feature image or a background shot for their published articles.

When I asked Gail for some advice about framing a shot, she explained that she had previously always travelled with her boyfriend, who is a professional photographer. However, since the fees offered for articles had dropped so much, he had retrained as a teacher and she had taken photography training herself so that she could produce her own travel photographs. That this is becoming increasingly common is easy enough to see just by examining the text and photographic credits in news-media travel journalism. Much of the trip was thus taken up with photographic opportunities, with each journalist striving to find something particular to photograph, perfecting their choice of subject, or posing for each other as requested.

At each destination, hosts welcomed us and told us something about their business. The first hotel owner, for example, was well known to Inntravel already, and told us stories about the islands and life in the village before the hotel was built. He laid on

dinner for the group, including local specialities, and showed us round the hotel, putting on an 'impromptu' demonstration of Faroese dancing, suitably embellished with a potted history of the survival of the Faroese language through colonial occupation (by Denmark). The journalists joined in enthusiastically. In many ways, the method resembles ethnographic participant-observation in that the journalists participate in various activities, then hide away to write their notes. Most of the journalists had tiny notebooks that they used to make brief notes as we went along (including verbatim citations), and kept laptops in their hotel rooms to upload photographs and start writing their articles.

The itinerary was packed with events – visits to sites of interest, meetings with local tourism entrepreneurs, walking tours, guided visits – so there was a great deal of material to work with. Each story can thus take on a different character and have something new to say about the destination. It is entirely up to the journalist to choose what to include in their article and how to shape it, but it is framed of course within the context of the journalistic genre of the particular publication. To write my story of 1200 words, for example, I could include only a few highlights from the trip, whereas Bob's long blog article on his own site covered almost every aspect of the trip.

The travel article is not a review article – it bears little in common with the restaurant review, for instance. The latter is paid for by the publication, and the author does not expect to return to the restaurant and can therefore give a judgmental view on the quality of the food and setting. The travel journalist may not be paid by the publication, and may be reliant on the PR company to get access to future trips, which, as they include many meals, accommodation and travel, are usually much more expensive than restaurant meals. Hence the travel journalist is unwise to write a scathing review, since editors and PR agents may not welcome bad reviews of their products. Instead, travel writers tend politely to ignore the less attractive parts of travel, writing critically only about incidental or quite general aspects of travel, or phrasing wittily ironic or self-deprecating remarks.

The travel journalists we spoke to denied, however, that they were mere ciphers for advertising copy. They look for interesting story-lines, report their own experience, and choose from the array of encounters and activities those highlights that they personally think will make a story. In other words, the journalists are primarily concerned with the creation of a good story, one that will sell well to publications and draw a broad readership benefiting both the publication and the destination, but also ensuring from their own perspective that future commissions come around. The travel journalism genre is consequently marked by genial story-telling, the kinds of light-hearted narratives, full of quirky detail or witty word-play, that might encourage a reader to stay with the story and imagine themselves on a similar trip, enjoying the highlights and ignoring irritants. So, in brief, the factbox supplies the minimum of

information required for a reader to find further information from tourist office or travel company, combining to instil or steer a desire to travel to the destination in focus.

### *Photographs*

As already noted above, travel journalists increasingly take their own photographs. For the *Scotsman* article, we chose to take another route, partly to demonstrate another element of the networks through which such articles are created. In this instance, we contacted the Faroese tourist office, whose representative we met during the press trip when we were taken to visit the tourist office. Part of the role of the tourist office, especially in such a small country (elsewhere the work may be divided between different institutions) is to promote the destination externally. The tourist office, (more correctly nowadays, the Destination Management Organisation or DMO) thus produces a variety of promotional material, and DMOs increasingly seek to produce materials of high quality. The Faroese DMO had thus commissioned a professional photographer to supply a bank of tourist images to be used in various contexts. This has the advantage of ensuring that photographs of all the areas the DMO wants to highlight are available, even if journalists visit the country, as we did, during weather conditions with poor visibility. (For most of the press trip, the country was shrouded in mist and low-level cloud, and although this enabled Simone to take some moody pictures, they were not of the quality required for enlargement to newspaper size.) This 'service' from the DMO is clearly also to the advantage of the publisher, which can access press-quality images with little trouble, and often without cost, since it is in the DMO's interests to ensure that attractive images circulate about the destination they hope to encourage tourists to visit.

### *Writing and publication*

Simone chose to write a moderately light-hearted article that described the misty weather head-on. She described the hike the group took to see a lighthouse, which they failed to find because of the mist, and included a teasing account of the tour-leader's vertiginous terror at suddenly coming close to the edge of a vertical cliff-face. In her description, she adhered to a travel-writing genre in omitting mention of the rest of the group of journalists, writing the story as if she, and perhaps a friend or two, happened to be on holiday in the Faroe islands. She could have chosen to write the whole article about misadventures: the church that was locked, the shops that were closed at the ferry terminal. But instead she appreciated that her role as participant in the press trip involved an obligation to write something that also highlighted what she had genuinely enjoyed about the visit. Although it was advertised as a walking trip, the group had not done any walks longer than an hour or two, so it was not possible to write a hiking review. However, of the many other activities in the timetable, she was able to write about those that interested her most. With Roger's advice, she edited and

re-edited a draft to try to ensure that it read as journalism, with a tight structure, clear storyline and some humour.

Her first edited draft was around 1500 words long, and this was sent to the newspaper editor as an email attachment. The editor's response read 'Just filed this to the ed, but it is 300w too long, any chance she could cut down for us to 1200w?' Word length is defined by the column inches devoted to any article, and weekend travel articles generally fit prescribed spaces. 1200 words makes a fairly substantial travel article for a weekend supplement, which with images will cover a double spread with another shorter article alongside. Two days after the first email response, the editor wrote again to ask if the article was ready, giving the email address of a colleague since she herself was going away. The revised, shorter article was sent later that same day.

Two months later, Simone wrote to the PR agent to assure him that the article had been submitted to the publisher, since she wanted him to know that she had upheld her side of the bargain. To her (perhaps naive) surprise, his response was, 'It has actually been in: I got the cuttings through agency a few days ago!' On her behalf, Roger wrote a friendly email to the editor asking if the piece had been published. Her response was short and to the point: 'Thanks Roger... Have attached Simone's piece, thanks for that. Best, ...', with a pdf of the published piece attached. There are perhaps two issues we can highlight in this exchange. First, the PR is monitoring the coverage of his subject through a cuttings agency, and has already established which of the journalists on the trip has published a piece. Early in the 'fam' trip, there was a joking conversation between Stan and two of the women journalists about who gets to be invited on 'fam' trips. It mostly circulated around how much fun they were having together, and how many publications they would generate out of the trip. Journalists who had participated in previous trips and either not published at all or not published anything substantial, were not invited on future trips, reiterating the point we make above about the reciprocity involved in the process. Second, the journalist's relationship with the editor can be fairly remote. In this case, Roger knew the editor, so it is possible she felt able to write minimal responses, but we believe that the editor is now handling a large number of unpaid contributors, including reader-contributors, and will be obliged to keep correspondence to a minimum if copy is to be published on a weekly basis. The editor may be working alone or with just one assistant, and may also be writing her own copy, and will judge the degree of nurturing required for each contributor. She will also be assuming that professional travel journalists expect no more from her and do not require her attention, being able to provide copy as agreed in advance.

### **Growing peripheries**

This particular publication was relatively straightforward – it involved participation in an organised trip and publication of an article in a national newspaper. Other trips can

be much more complex on either side. For example, Roger and Simone recently embarked on another trip that was self-organised. In this particular instance, the major challenge for them was to persuade a travel company to provide tickets for a long-distance rail journey. None of the national papers were interested in this journey, so we approached a number of internet travel sites. The travel company set out particular demands, as did the websites. These included a site whose profile is based on environmentally friendly holidays, and a site designed for people over the age of 50. The latter were particularly insistent on our need to imagine ourselves into the mindset of someone over this age (less difficult for Simone than for Roger), and ensure that any articles we submitted would be 'age-appropriate'.

Roger knew the travel company's PR agent from when she had worked for another company, and engaged in a fairly lengthy set of negotiations with her about what the company would require in return for the train tickets. In this case, the company were fairly demanding and sent a list of requirements. This included three blog articles, one of which was for the company's own web page, with each feature to be 700–800 words, to include images, and to be written in the style required by the websites' target audiences. They also specified the writing angle in terms of 'the enjoyment of travelling around Scotland by rail (being 50+ age group!)', attaching in addition a guide to content writing for the in-house blog. They sent a description of a further rail journey that they wanted to be the focus of the article content, which included their own brochure copy describing the journey. Finally, they sent a 20-page 'guide to content and SEO', Search Engine Optimisation. With reference to our point above about the freedom of writers, we note here that our articles did describe the train journeys, as well as going into detail about the activities provided by a local hotel owner who had offered us accommodation. Roger wrote an additional article for an in-flight magazine (which was paid for, as in-flight articles are more likely to be) describing a luxurious castle-hotel that we were able to visit, while not mentioning at all another rather down-at-heel castle-hotel which had 'forgotten' our booking and offered appalling restaurant service, with indifferent food and surly staff. We might also note that the latter hotel was full when we stayed.

We did a rough calculation of the investment made by the travel company in the tickets versus our hours spent on the assignment. The full publicly advertised price for the tickets came to a total of roughly £610 (which is obviously not the amount the company expends on complimentary tickets), for which the company would receive promotion on two sites with high readership figures, plus copy for their in-house magazine. On the other hand, we would spend approximately four days travelling, several days in preparation organising associated logistics such as accommodation and local travel, and some time editing and optimising photographic images and preparing the texts. This illustrates the precarious financial situation that many writers find themselves in, and why those who write for a living tend to supplement trips with writing copy for multiple publications, franchising their work, writing and managing blogs for other companies, publishing guidebooks or other materials, or working as

editors for publishers. We have no space here to go into detail about questions of employment rights, financial equity, or why writers are prepared to accept conditions that otherwise might seem exploitative or unreasonable; suffice to say that the demands of travel companies can become excessive. In other cases, companies also require writers to tweet on a regular basis during their trip, require action-videos to complement online articles, and expect that writers will have popular blogs of their own that will route readers to the publisher's materials. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the lure of free or subsidised travel appears to draw people to the field of travel writing and journalism who either have independent incomes or are willing to write occasional travel pieces in return for the provision of travel and accommodation.

## Conclusion

In our introduction, we suggested that unveiling the politics and relations of production of travel journalism through a close study of everyday practices in the industry might begin to uncover how cultural stereotypes are reproduced, travel tropes perpetuated, and ethical positions negotiated, all of which underpin the published texts. Based on our preliminary research findings, we would argue that writers are engaged in a tight mesh of relationships that ties together travel companies (holiday companies, transport providers), actors in the hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants), publishers, PR agents, and several others. As we note above, the balance of power seems gradually to have shifted away from the writers as publishers have cut the budgets available to pay professional journalists, both reducing the pool of paid journalism and expanding the space for reader-contributions and unpaid amateurs. But our main concern here has been how the stories get into publication, and our experience demonstrates that writers are largely supplied with readymade narratives by both PR agents (especially those operating as guides during familiarisation trips) and DMOs in the copy they provide for information purposes. Writers also hear first-hand from local business actors the stories they would like to have told about themselves. Writers are under different degrees of obligation to choose the angle for their publications (here we have contrasted the relative *laissez faire* of the Faroes' story with the required angle for the train journey), but they remain largely free to make their own judgements about what is appropriate and preferable to write. Notwithstanding, whatever freedoms they have they are still choosing from a restricted range of information that is accessible during a fast-paced trip, whether through snatched conversations with local hosts or picked up from prepared tourism narratives. Writers thus fit their work to the travel-journalism genre, playing on familiar themes that most readers will recognise.

There is no reason why a travel journalist should bring a critical (e.g. postcolonial) perspective to writing about the North; it is much more likely they will build on the established narratives that are most familiar to their readers and that they themselves

feel most comfortable to write (the polar explorer, the lonely polar bear, etc.: see Jonsson and others in this issue). Editors on the whole do not expect travel journalists to write challenging or critical pieces, although Simone's avoidance of clichés about the Faroes was happily accepted. We believe that this experiment demonstrates that travel journalism does not need to reproduce colonial tropes, but that it still lacks a critical threshold that might require avoidance. National publishers do sometimes include critical articles on the tourism industry including work on the tourism industry's waste, injustice for indigenous people in tourism resorts, or environmental threats from tourism development (e.g. cruise tourism). However, these are more likely to appear in the 'serious' section of news publications rather than in lifestyle sections, even if these latter sections occasionally include guides to responsible or ecological tourism. If a more ethical, postcolonial travel journalism is to emerge, it will need to come from industry collaboration, with suitably enlightened commissioning editors at the helm.